Kathavana: Children's Literature Festival, 2015

September 9-11, 2015  Bengaluru

Theme: Teachers as Readers

September 9  (10.30am-4.30pm) : Discussions and Workshop at Azim Premji University
September 10 (10.00am – 4.00pm) : Children’s Festival at Government Model Primary School for Girls, Sarjapura
September 11 (9.30am – 5.00pm) : Teacher Professional Development Workshops at Government Model Primary School for Boys, Sarjapura

Azim Premji Foundation has been organizing a children’s literature festival, Kathavana, since 2012. This multilingual festival brings together children, storytellers, publishers, teachers, academics and other educators to celebrate and explore the world of children’s literature. Kathavana has a special focus on working with children in government or low-fee private schools, in keeping with the overall vision and mandate of Azim Premji Foundation.

Since its inception, Kathavana has been exploring the role that children’s literature can play in schools, and ultimately, in the lives of the people it touches. In most Indian schools, literature is introduced only in upper grades and is often taught in ways that don’t connect the readers meaningfully with the texts. Ideally, engaging with literature should be a pleasurable experience. It should provide opportunities for individuals to see the familiar with new eyes; and to understand and engage with the unfamiliar in thoughtful ways. Children who are exposed to good literature from a very early age develop a relationship with reading and writing that lasts a lifetime. Using literature as an intrinsic part of the curriculum also enables teachers to engage children with reading, writing, discussing, responding, and thinking about topics of social and personal significance.
The recent decades have witnessed a burgeoning interest in publishing of children’s literature in India. Various publishers, such as National Book Trust, Children’s Book Trust, Tulika, Pratham, Jyotsna Prakashan and Katha, to name a few, have published a growing number of children’s books in English, Hindi and several regional languages. These publishers have been experimenting in interesting ways with genre, narratives, illustrations and production. In addition to this, regional language publishers have also been adding interesting titles to their children’s book selections. The Right to Education Act mandates that every school has a library – thus, bringing the worlds of children and books together at a national policy level.

What would it take to make this policy vision a reality in schools and classrooms? In previous years, Kathavana provided forums for three different kinds of activities: (1) forums for children to interact and engage with high-quality literature, and to meet authors and illustrators; (2) forums for teachers to engage in professional development efforts such as learning to set up a library, learning to select good books, learning to conduct read-alouds, etc.; and (3) a forum for different stake-holders from the English and Kannada-speaking worlds to come together and discuss relevant ideas and issues.

Our learnings from these experiences have been rich and thought provoking. Our journey has revealed to us the centrality of teacher learning about literature. Teacher learning, we are convinced, cannot happen through stand-alone workshops, or, even through mini-projects undertaken in classrooms. It has to be sustained, long-term and would require a fair amount of teacher time and commitment; as also, consistent mentoring and guidance from experienced others.

We have decided to continue having various forums that we had in earlier versions of Kathavana – but to shift the central emphasis of the festival to teacher learning this year, designating the theme of Kathavana 2015 as: Teachers as Readers.

The following forums have been planned for Kathavana 2015:

**Teacher Development Forums: Teachers as Readers (2 days)**

Most teachers that we have encountered over the course of our work are not consistent readers themselves. The power, beauty and magic of literature has not touched their lives for the most part; or, if it has, the environment has not been conducive to maintaining a rich relationship with literature. Teachers cannot bring the power of literature to the lives of children when their own lives are untouched by it. Under such circumstances, even well planned teacher workshops on children’s literature and how to use it in classrooms, will remain theoretical bits of knowledge and skills that lie
outside of the teachers’ own lived realities and experience. Our aim this year is to help teachers themselves to develop as readers of good literature. We have designed the Kathavana teacher forums as a 6-8 months long process during which a small group of pre-selected, committed teachers will come together to explore literature and its nuances through guided reading clubs. Key features of the process:

- 15-25 teachers will be selected from a small set of partner schools of Azim Premji Foundation, largely from the Kodathi and Sarjapura areas of Bengaluru, where we have long term investments and commitments. This will ensure the continuity of professional development efforts with teachers over a number of years.
- These teachers will meet with members of Kathavana team for an orientation programme prior to the Kathavana festival, where objectives and purposes will be clarified; and interest and commitment ascertained.
- They will meet on 2 days during the Kathavana festival, when relevant theoretical concepts will be introduced and discussed, and a plan of action for future meetings will be charted out.
- The teachers, along with Kathavana facilitators, will meet once a month for half a day between October 2015 and February 2016. During this time, teachers will work in small groups to read short stories, poetry, short plays and children’s literature in Kannada or English and discuss.
- They will meet in March 2016 to reflect on (a) their learnings over the past year about themselves as readers; (b) what they learned about good literature and ways to engage with it; (c) thoughts on how to engage children with it; and (4) ways to sustain their own reading habits and advance further.

Bi-lingual Round Tables: Who is a Good Reader? (1/2 day)
Kathavana has always brought together a variety of stake-holders from the Kannada and English speaking worlds for discussions. However, in previous years, the discussion forums were held in a bifurcated manner, with one English panel; and another Kannada panel. A challenge of this format has been to get the Kannada and English speaking participants to interact and share ideas, experiences and thoughts with one another. Keeping this in mind, we propose to hold bi-lingual round-tables in Kathavana 2015. The topic ‘Who is a good reader?’; while deceptively simple, permits diverse participants to enter the conversation from different angles, experiences and opinions, thus providing opportunities for a rich and stimulating conversation. The topic for the round table is also in keeping with the overall theme of the festival: Teachers as Readers.
Participants will be permitted to choose to participate in small groups that are entirely Kannada-speaking; English-speaking; or bi-lingual. However, at the end of the small group discussions, the large-group sharing will be bi-lingual in nature, thus serving the purpose of having participants encounter and engage with the experiences of the other linguistic world.

**Children at the Children’s Literature Festival (1 day)**

This year, we have decided to restrict children’s participation in the festival to a single day. In previous years, we have had a footfall of between 1700-1800 children over 2-3 days at Makkala Koota (Chamrajpet). Children were exposed to a rich variety of experiences, such as, story-telling, puppet-shows, read alouds, games around literature, and meet-the-author and meet-the-illustrator events. While these were exhilarating and enjoyable for the children, we were concerned that a once-a-year event of this nature is insufficient to bring literature into the daily lives of these children. We can celebrate literature on an annual basis only after it has first been established as an important and ongoing part of their lives. Simply transplanting the concept of once-a-year celebrations from more affluent and literate strata of society is not so meaningful in the contexts in which we are working. It has some value – that of creating visibility for children’s literature in the minds of participants, media and others - but it doesn’t change the situation on the ground beyond that. At the same time it is unthinkable to have a children’s literature event without children – hence, Kathavana 2015 has been designed to celebrate children’s literature with children for the span of one day; while the bulk of our time will be taken up with working intensely with our teacher participants. It is possible that in future years, we will revert to having more days dedicated to children’s participation in the festival.

**Workshop for Azim Premji University Students (1/2 day)**

A workshop will be organized during the festival with students of the MA Education programme at Azim Premji University in mind. This workshop will be approximately 2-3 hours long, and will be designed keeping the needs and interests of our students.

We look forward to your participation at KathaVana 2015!

[Click here](#) for English poster of Kathavana 2015

[Click here](#) for Kannada poster of Kathavana 2015